

VZCZCXRO1559
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHAK #1581/01 1720827
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 210827Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2682
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU
RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//
RHMFISS/39ABG CP INCIRLIK AB TU
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/425ABS IZMIR TU//CC//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001581

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2022

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: PRE-ELECTION TENSIONS HIGH IN THE SOUTHEAST

Classified By: Adana PO Eric Green, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Kurds in southeastern Turkey feel increasingly squeezed by a lethal combination of political, economic and geopolitical factors. In addition to pre-election political pressure, an increase in PKK violence and continued economic stagnation, community leaders believe Kurds in the SE are the principal victims of Turkey's continued dysfunctional relationship with Northern Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). While most locals do not believe Turkish forces will enter Iraq, they are chafing under heightened security measures and worry the military may intimidate voters during next month's election. Local leaders also point to the election as causing an alarming spike in Turkish (and anti-Kurdish) nationalism. The common thread in these factors is the Turkish military's heavy influence over GOT policies in both southeast Turkey and Northern Iraq. Kurds' hopes that the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) was reforming Turkey to limit the military's power remain alive, but they recognize that this year's elections may be another in a long series of battles for more democracy. End summary.

12. (U) During a week-long visit (June 11-15) to Turkey, southeastern provinces of Van, Hakkari, Sirnak and Diyarbakir, Adana PO and Ankara PolCouns met with a variety of government and political party officials, business leaders and representatives of civil society groups.

Troop Build-up: Hidden Agendas

13. (C) While not excusing the PKK's attacks, our contacts said in their view, the massive build-up of Turkish forces in the southeast and bellicose statements by the Turkish General Staff (TGS) are intended principally to weaken AKP in advance of the coming elections by making it appear unable to maintain security inside Turkey, borders and unwilling to chase down terrorists in Northern Iraq (NIZ). A secondary goal for the TGS, they said, is to frighten the Kurdish authorities in NIZ. Halil Balkan, President of the Sirnak Chamber of Commerce, quipped, "This conflict is going on way above the heads of the PKK."

14. (C) For Kurdish leaders in the region, concerns about a potential intervention into Iraq are secondary to the disruption of day-to-day life in the region and the possibility that the as-yet undefined rules of the newly

declared "security zones" that the military designated near the border could presage wider crackdowns on civil liberties.

Hakkari deputy governor Ali Pehlivan and other state officials told us that, as far as they are aware, the zones do not denote any special legal status (many human-rights activists fear the zones are a precursor to the emergency rule imposed on the region in the 1990s), yet could not explain the zones' purpose. Pehlivan added that, for more information, we would have to ask in Ankara. Rojbin Tugan, a prominent Hakkari lawyer, told us that the number of Jandarma check-points throughout the province had increased markedly. She cited one case where a soldier had warned locals that they "couldn't be responsible" for their safety if they chose to travel on roads after dusk -- an illegal stance, she noted, given there is no formal curfew. In Sirnak, foreign and Turkish journalists told us they were delayed by military check-points for several hours on June 13 and denied access to roads leading to border areas where the military build-up is the heaviest.

15. (C) Pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) leaders told us they believe the heightened security in the region will be used to disrupt their campaign activities and intimidate voters, come election day. The DTP party chairman in Van reported that his candidates were being delayed by traffic police for trivial vehicle code violations or for inordinately long document checks at Jandarma check-points. In Diyarbakir, AK Party candidate Abdulrahman Kurt said he shared the concern that in rural areas a heavy police and military presence will be used to force people to cast votes for the CHP and MHP.

16. (C) If Turkish forces do in fact cross the Iraqi border,

ANKARA 00001581 002 OF 003

our contacts predicted a severe backlash in southeast Turkey, with widespread civil unrest possible in large cities. Diyarbakir Chamber of Commerce President Sahismail Bedirhanoglu said that, if it wants to enter NIZ, the Turkish military's plans would have to assume that it would need to pacify southeastern Turkey as far north as Diyarbakir, as well as areas south of the Turkish-Iraqi border. Sirnak mayor Ertak said he believed disorder within Turkey following a CBO would cost hundreds of lives.

Growing Nationalism and Electoral Politics

17. (C) Beyond the short-term implications of the current military build-up, Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir expressed alarm at growing nationalism throughout Turkey, which he said is stoking anti-Kurdish, anti-EU and anti-American emotions. "Those who are encouraging this isolationistic wave may decide to reverse it in a year or two, but it won't be so easy."

18. (C) Many interlocutors cited two stark expressions of anti-Kurdish bias by official Ankara as increasing Turkish-Kurdish polarization. In its April 27 e-memo, the TGS wrote that anyone not subscribing to Ataturk's motto "Happy is he who calls himself a Turk" would be considered an enemy, which they saw as an implicit reference to Kurds who favor measures to make Turkey's laws and institutions better accommodate the country's multicultural makeup. A second example was the Turkish parliament's passage of legal amendments which they believed were intended to make voting for independent candidates (the route DTP has chosen to contest July's election) more complicated, which will disproportionately affect the uneducated voters in the southeast. Baydemir complained that AKP and the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), though at each other's throats on other issues, found instant consensus on measures to suppress the DTP vote.

19. (C) Kurdish leaders noted that the judiciary is also ratcheting up the pressure on politicians who speak out in

favor of more cultural or political rights; dozens have also been prosecuted for using the honorific "sayin" in referring to PKK leader Ocalan. These legal actions are targeting many parliamentary candidates and could be used to force some to withdraw (or campaign from jail).

Turkey,s Nightmare: Kurdish Northern Iraq

¶10. (C) Our interlocutors believe that Turkish "paranoia" over developments in Northern Iraq (NIZ), magnified by the GOT's distrust its own Kurdish citizens, is fueling the increased legal and military pressure of recent months. Baydemir noted that an autonomous, prosperous NIZ is an opportunity for Turkey, not a threat. Adnan Elci, the President of the Chamber of Commerce in Cizre, a city on the Iraqi border that relies heavily on trade, said that Turkey simply needs to get used to the fact that the KRG is going to incorporate Kirkuk into its territory and will become more autonomous over time. "There is no problem with that. There are 20,000 Turks working in Iraq and over 150 companies there. We will benefit economically."

¶11. (C) Elci added, however, that in his view, the Turkish state does not trust its own Kurdish citizens, who in turn are losing trust in their state. Yilmaz Akinci, a Diyarbakir-based reporter who works with NPR and the Wall Street Journal, said that "if the Kurds established an independent state in Antarctica, Turkey would still be hostile. They can't tolerate this."

¶12. (C) This vicious cycle, local Kurdish leaders (including DTP officials) acknowledged, has been accelerated in recent weeks by the PKK's increased tempo of attacks on military and civilian targets. The PKK's motivation to end its winter cease-fire -- against the objections of some DTP leaders -- are obscure. Most believed that the PKK "had" to respond to the Turkish military's relentless pressure, and denied the PKK was responsible for civilian deaths.

ANKARA 00001581 003 OF 003

Comment

¶13. (C) For the last six months, Kurdish leaders in the southeast had been looking forward to the elections, hoping a new AKP-endorsed president and a parliament including DTP representatives would reinvigorate Turkey's democratization and even prompt a holistic approach to the PKK issue by creating a political process to complement the military's tactics. While prominent Kurdish leaders continue to profess faith that democracy will ultimately prevail, they fear the military's assertiveness against the AKP and the multi-front clampdown on Kurdish politicians means that the July elections will only represent another stage in a struggle that could continue for many months to come. In the meantime, the inability of moderates to show progress in achieving Kurds' cultural and political aspirations through democratic processes allows space for the PKK's continued existence as a channel for simmering discontent.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON